

Kelly Dalton is a 7th grade student at Resurrection St. Paul School. Her essay on Mildred "Babe" Didrikson Zaharias won the middle school division (grades 6 through 8) of this year's Women's Commission essay contest.

"WOMEN CHANGE AMERICA"

Mildred "Babe" Didrikson Zaharias

by Kelly Dalton

After researching the many fabulous women who made significant impact in the quality of American life, I chose Mildred "Babe" Didrikson Zaharias. The reason I chose "Babe" was because of her background as a pioneer in woman's athletics. If it were not for Babe's tenacity and popularity in woman's athletics, I would probably not have the opportunity to participate in all the sports which make up a significant part of my life, personality and character.

Babe was born into poverty in a small South Texas town called Port Arthur. The daughter of Norwegian immigrants, her father was a seaman and her mother was a Norwegian ice skater. Early in Babe's youth, her father realized that his daughter had an incredible athletic ability and built gymnasium gear in his backyard for her to practice on. Babe acquired her strange nickname from her friends after she hit five home runs in a neighborhood baseball game.

Babe enjoyed sports and was frustrated when she found that there were not many sports available for women either in school or professionally. In the 1920's there was a movement to eliminate interscholastic competitions for girls due to the "undue stress and morbid social influences". Babe was accomplished in Track and Field, Basketball, Baseball, and Golf. In 1930 Babe was recruited out of high school into amateur track and field events. Her performances in the javelin throw, hurdles, and high jump qualified her to enter the 1932 Olympics, where she again broke world records in all three events. She later went on to an unparalleled career as a woman athlete. In 1949 she became one of the founding members of the Ladies' Professional Golf Association. In 1950, Babe Didrikson Zaharias was voted the outstanding woman athlete of the century in a 1950 Associated Press poll.

Thankfully, due to Babe's personality and her great athletic ability, she was able to change the attitude of women in sports. Today, there are organizations like the Women's National Basketball Association, The Women's Professional Rodeo Association, The Women's United Soccer Association and many other professional women's sport organizations. Funding for women's sports through legislation such as Title IX which provides for equal federal funding for men's and women's sports are a testimony to this early pioneer of women's sports.

If Mildred "Babe" Didrikson Zaharias had not persevered, had accepted "no" as an answer, had given up to the culture and male-dominated opinion of women's competitive sports in the 1920's, I would probably be learning needle-point instead of getting ready for Lacrosse practice right now. Thanks Babe! You truly changed my life!

Heather Connor, a 9th grade student at Reservoir High School, submitted the winning essay for grades 9 through 12.